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ABSTRACT

Designed to dramatize constitutional issues in the history of Rensselaer County, New York, the struggle for women's rights is the focus of this play that is intended for fourth grade students as part of their local history curriculum. The play has four objectives: to enable students to understand the meaning of inequality, to show how the lives of women and blacks were affected by inequality, to illustrate how ideas about changing women's lives differed, and to relate past inequalities to the present. The play itself involves four famous pioneers in the struggle for equal rights for women--Emma Willard, Susan B. Anthony, Harriet Tubman, and Kate Mullaney--each of whom had a connection to Rensselaer County. (DB)

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Four Who Dared

Women Who Made History in Rensselaer County

by

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In 1989, the New York State Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Consti-
tution awarded a grant to Russell Sage College to create a dramatization of consti-
tutional issues in the history of Rensselaer County. An important but unrecognized
aspect of this history was the struggle for women's rights.

The purpose of the project was to produce a 40-minute play for fourth-grade stu-
dents as part of their curriculum on local history. The play was augmented by study
materials given to the classes before the performance was viewed. The play was per-
formed on twelve occasions in elementary schools throughout Rensselaer County and
at Russell Sage College in 1989-90.

The project had the following objectives:

1. To enable students to understand the meaning of inequality.
2. To show how the lives of women and blacks were affected by inequality.
3. To illustrate how ideas about changing women's lives differed.
4. To relate past inequalities to the present.

For social studies teachers who might wish to use the play in class, the following
suggestions/observations might be helpful.

1. The play is appropriate for performance/study/viewing from fourth grade
thru twelfth grade.
2. For actual performance, it might be advisable to rely upon students in grades
9-12, however grades 4-8 could learn a lot from a staged *reading*.
3. Encourage students to make or approximate period clothing.
4. Use minimal props.
5. Make any changes that would enliven the performance.
6. Most important, make the production a combined teaching effort. Find faculty
partners who can lend expertise in their field. Such an effort would most
closely approximate the process of creating this play—a marriage of the so-
cial sciences and performing arts.

*Maren Stein of Russell Sage College conceptualized, researched, and prepared study
materials for the project. Richard Jones, also of Russell Sage College, wrote and pro-
duced the play. During its first year, the play was performed by Sage students.*

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(A quiet corner of the N.Y.S. Museum. Four display cases set in a roughly semi-circular configuration, facing the audience. In each of the cases is a female mannequin in historical dress. S.L. is a display board with the words, "The Struggle for Equal Rights." D.C. is a padded bench. Seated on the bench is a young girl, Mary, of about 11, hurriedly tying her sneaker.)

Mary: *(Shouting toward the audience, as if to a classmate)* I'm right here! Tell her I'm coming! *(Directly to the audience)* My teacher, Mrs. Austin, wants me to hurry up. Everybody's getting on the bus. How come I'm always the last one? . . . I don't know . . . But I do know how I feel! My feet hurt, I'm hungry, and I'm tired! . . . But *most* of all, I bored! Museums are so boring! Just a lot of dummies, like these right here. *(Gesturing to the mannequins)* Aren't they silly? Who are these ladies? Why are they dressed so goofy? Anyway, who cares? They don't have anything to do with me. *(Feeling sorry for herself. A big yawn)* Nothing in this place has anything to do with me! *(She falls asleep and the entire play is her dream—After a few seconds, she dreams she awakes.)* Hey! must've fallen asleep for a minute, I'd better hurry up, or Mrs. Austin will come back after me. . . . *(The D.R. mannequin, Emma Willard, comes to life.)*

Emma: Pardon me, little girl . . . Mary . . .

Mary: *(Stopping dead in her tracks)* Huh?

Emma: Your name is Mary, is it not?

Mary: How'd you know that? Who are you, anyway?

Emma: Emma. When I was your age I was Emma Hart, but when I got married, I became Emma Willard.

Mary: But . . . you were in that case over there . . . statues can't talk!

Emma: I could not help but hear what you said.

Mary: I didn't say anything!

Emma: As I recall, you said that nothing in this museum had anything to do with you

Mary: Hey! I'm sorry! Listen, don't get upset. . . .

Emma: You need not be frightened. I understand your feelings. Museums can, sometimes, be puzzling. There's so much to learn about, one hardly knows where to begin.

Mary: You talk just like my teacher, Mrs. Austin.

Emma: Naturally, I was a teacher right here in Rensselaer County. That was long ago, when Thomas Jefferson was our president.

Mary: Really?

Emma: And I had sixteen brothers and sisters!

Mary: Oh my gosh!

Emma: *(Indicating audience)* If you would be so kind as to sit with the children, I will tell you my story and we'll

play a little game. And, my dear Mary, I promise you that you shall not be bored! *(Mary sits in the audience)* I grew up on my father's farm. We raised sheep. All the wool that we gathered was divided into three parts. My father received the best wool, my brothers received the next best, and that which was left, the poorest quality wool, was given to the women.

Mary: But didn't the women make everyone's clothes out of the wool?

Emma: Of course, it was our main task.

Mary: Then how come you got the worst wool for yourselves? I mean, you worked hard, didn't you? It doesn't seem fair.

Emma: Indeed it doesn't, although as a girl I thought little about fairness. I only made sure that I obeyed my mother and father. I thought that I would always be a farm girl and farm life had its traditions. Then, when I was twelve, a wonderful thing happened. My father began to tell me about all the ideas in the books he had read. He became my teacher, in a way, and I started to study geometry, and. . . .

Mary: Ick! Wasn't it bad enough going to school and doing homework without your dad bugging you with even more school stuff?

Emma: You misunderstand, Mary. In those days few, if any, girls went to school, and those who did had to stop at the end of sixth grade. But with my father's approval, I *did* go to school and became a teacher. I was teaching in Vermont when I met John Willard. Shortly after my 22nd birthday we were married. *(To audience)* Let me ask you a question. How many of you have mothers with jobs outside your home? Mary, would you please count hands and report the number to me? *(Mary instructs audience to raise hands, counts, banters, etc.)* That is a true amazement to me. It's inspiring to see that we have come so far in 180 years.

Mary: I don't understand what you mean.

Emma: In my time it was unthinkable for a woman to work when she was married. If my husband had not lost nearly all our money, I never would have returned to teaching. He needed my help and he had always encouraged me in my quest for knowledge. I had not taught for five years, and I decided to go to a nearby college to sharpen my mind, but they refused to accept me.

Mary: Why? Were you guys too poor to pay?

Emma: No, we could afford it.

Mary: I know they couldn't say you weren't *smart* enough . . . why were you kept out?

Emma: Because I was a woman, and only men could attend the college.

Mary: Oh . . . that's cool, I mean, you could have gone to Russell Sage or some other college for women.

Emma: No, there weren't any. In those days, women could not study the same subjects as men. We only learned proper manners, religion, reading, and house skills such as cooking. Mary, let's try a little experiment! Ask two of the boys and two of the girls to come here to me.

(Mary gets volunteers. During this game, the following events should take place with free-form dialogue among Emma, Mary, and the children; each pair is asked to write their favorite school subjects on a pad of paper; each group is then asked if it would be a good idea for only class members of their sex to study that subject; each group is asked why they responded the way they did. Regardless of their answers, Emma replies with something like, ". . . the situation that I found myself in . . ." Emma then segues directly into. . .)

Do you know what I did? I taught myself the college subjects that only men could study. And I opened my own school in Vermont.

Mary: All right! Way to go, Emma-baby! . . . er . . . uh . . . I mean . . .

Emma: *(Dismissing Mary's embarrassment with a smile)* I was so pleased with the success of my school! I believed it was the beginning of a new and happy era in the history of womankind! I decided to open a bigger school in Waterford, New York. Do you know where Waterford is? *(If not, she tells them.)* Then I heard that Troy wanted a female academy, and I moved there in 1821 and opened the Troy Female Seminary.

Mary: Hey, wait a minute . . . did you know Uncle Sam? He lived in Troy back then. I remember from the exhibit I saw in the other room. . . .

Emma: I thought you said museums were boring? *(Mary looks sheepish)* No, I didn't know Samuel Wilson personally, but from my window I could see his wagons rolling down to the docks. Troy was a tiny little river town, but I knew that the Erie Canal was going to change everything. Soon there would be many people and children who needed to go to school. That's why I trained my young ladies to be teachers.

Mary: Was it hard to learn to be a teacher back then?

Emma: *(Taking a list from her sleeve.)* Here is a list of the subjects my young ladies studied. *(Gives it to Mary)*

Mary: "Reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, grammar, geography, history, maps, the globe, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, astronomy, natural philosophy, chemistry, botany, physiology, mineralogy, geology, and zoology" . . . Awesome!

Emma: Turn the list over.

Mary: Huh?

Emma: What you read listed the subjects my young ladies studied in the morning.

Mary: *(Thunderstruck)* IN THE MORNING! All I can say is I hope they packed down plenty of pizza at lunch, because they must have been exhausted! *(Turning the list over)* In the afternoon they studied dancing, drawing, painting, French, Italian, Spanish, and German! Gee, and I think school is hard if we have a fire drill!

Emma: Besides their studies, my young ladies and I engaged in weekly talks on manners and behavior. Each of them lived in a small room with a roommate and did their own cleaning and cooking.

Mary: Sounds like fun. Hey, did any of your students become like doctors or lawyers or anything?

Emma: I did not believe that men and women should compete for the same jobs. Girls, after all, looked forward to marriage and motherhood. For them, household affairs and the early teaching of their children were most important. *(This last speech stirs to life the mannequin of Susan B. Anthony. Dressed in the "Bloomer" costume, she marches to Emma, very agitated.)*

SBA: And that's just where you made your mistake, Willard! Teaching your young ladies to be inferior to men!

Emma: Nonsense! I taught my students to be able to think seriously. But I also believed that a woman's beauty, grace, and manners were a great source of power for good.

Mary: *(To the audience)* I cannot believe this lady's clothes! I mean, they are just too gross! Maybe she's with the circus?

SBA: I heard that! Isn't it just like 1989 children to make fun of anything they don't understand. *(Pointing to Mary's jeans)* Just what do you call those things?

Mary: *(A bit too sassy)* Stonewashed Levi 501's. In case you haven't heard, these are cool, Lady.

Emma: Mary, mind your tongue. Do you know to whom you are speaking? *(Mary looks puzzled)*

SBA: Susan B. Anthony's the name. I am wearing the style originated by Amelia Bloomer. Many women of my acquaintance wore them. They gave us freedom to move more freely and kept us cool during the summer. They are, in fact, the first pants for American women. That makes them the great-great-grandmother of your 5-0-whatever they are!

Mary: Gosh, I'm sorry. . . . I didn't mean to be rude.

SBA: I forgive you, my dear. I feel a bit angry at the moment, angry at the slow progress of the Equal Rights Movement during my life. I died in 1906 and women had to wait until 1920 to get the vote.

Mary: My mom didn't vote last time. She said she was too busy that day.

SBA: Too busy to vote? Outrageous! I hope that when I'm through today every girl in this class will realize what a hard-won treasure the right to vote is. Women of today don't realize how *bad* things used to be. Mrs. Willard, when you opened the Troy Female Seminary, to whom was the property rented?

Emma: To my husband, of course.

SBA: Even though he had nothing to do with your school?

Emma: Naturally. Because I was a woman, the property—by law—was leased to my husband.

SBA: And I say that made *you* the legal property of your husband! It was a *blot* on civilization! And so it was for much of my life. When I was a teenager, I can remember telling my father that a young woman, Sally Ann Hyatt, would make an excellent supervisor at our family mill. He looked at me sternly and said, "It would never do to have a *woman* as supervisor. End of discussion! He never told me why. When I was in fourth grade, I was not taught division in arithmetic. Why? Because I was a girl!

Emma: You should have come to my school, Miss Anthony.

SBA: Yes, your famous Female Seminary. *(To audience)* Did you know that Emma Willard started the first physical education classes for girls in our country?

Emma: I took great pride in our exercise program. It was designed to develop the health of the whole body.

Mary: Wait a minute! You mean that, before Mrs. Willard, girls didn't take gym? Not even kickball or gymnastics? Why?

SBA: Because many doctors believed that if a girl was educated it would strain her brain, and make it impossible for her to have babies.

Emma: But physical exercise could balance the mental strain.

SBA: Poppycock! The whole idea was just a foolish superstition that kept women from being viewed as equal to men.

Mary: My cousin's going to have a baby and she exercises with a video every day.

Emma: Of course, you're right. But the doctors had great authority.

SBA: Authority that we had to fight! I was always a fighter. I began in the Temperance Movement. *(To the audience)* Do you know what that was? *(If no reply, Mary speaks up)*

Mary: Learning how to control your temper?

SBA: *(Smiling)* No, my dear. The Temperance Movement tried to persuade people to give up drinking alcohol. After that, I became an abolitionist.

Mary: I know what that is—someone who wanted to free the slaves, like Abraham Lincoln did!

SBA: Thanks to the pressure we applied. Then, after our horrible Civil War, I realized my true calling was in helping the girls and women of America in every way I could.

Mary: How? Were you a teacher like Mrs. Willard?

SBA: At first, yes. Then one day I discovered that one of the male teachers in my school was paid \$40 a month while, for the identical work, I received only \$10 a month. I was so angry, I resigned from my teaching position. A few years later, a marvelous event occurred in Seneca Falls, New York. In 1848 the first convention for women's rights was held. It was led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, whom I met some time after that.

Emma: Yes, I knew of her. She wrote that men *and* women are created equal, and she called for women's suffrage.

Mary: What does suffrage mean?

SBA: Suffrage means the right to vote. I joined the movement, but our work stopped during the Civil War. When peace came, the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution gave the right to vote to freed *male* slaves. Women of both races were again ignored! Can you imagine what it is like to have no say in matters that concern you? Let me show you how difficult it was for us. *(To audience)* Please take out the ballots which you filled out earlier today.

(Mary and Emma collected the pink and blue ballots, separated them, and hand them to SBA who rips up the blue ballots, tossing them into the air and saying) Boys are not allowed to vote! (Since only the girls' ballots are counted, a girl will clearly be elected. Her name is announced and she is asked to come forward. Sotto voce, SBA asked the child if she likes the color pink. She is then told to ask the class how many like pink, how many don't. She tells the class that boys votes don't count and that everyone, including boys will have to wear pink to school every Friday. Susan continues to speak.)

I am sure that all the boys in the class would be angry and embarrassed if they really had to wear pink every Friday. Yet, if this election were real, what choice would the boys have? They could not change the color unless they could vote. And they could not vote unless the girls let them.

Emma: But the girls would not let the boys vote unless the boys *liked* pink.

Mary: Then there's no way the boys could win. And you say it really used to be like that for women? So what could you . . . I mean, we do? If I'd been around back then I would've been so angry I probably would've gotten into big trouble.

SBA: Humph! I've known lots of "trouble" in my day, dearie. *(Laughing)* I remember back in 1852 I went to a temperance meeting in Albany. Women were permitted to attend, but were supposed to keep silent. I decided I *had* to speak, but when I raised my hand the man leading the meeting said, "the sisters were not invited here to speak, but to listen and learn."

Emma: That's an attitude I knew all too well. Men treated grown women as if they had no mind at all.

SBA: I was thrown out of that meeting, and when I called meetings of my own in Albany, several ministers said I was "half man half woman, belonging to neither sex." *(Laughing)* But such foolish words were no more to me than the quacking of ducks. . . . Then there was the time fourteen women and I were arrested in Rochester.

Mary: Why? What did you do?

SBA: The warrant said we illegally voted in the election of 1872. We *did* vote, but we felt we had the right to do so. I'll never forget the chamber where the officials questioned us. A cold, dark room with smoke-stained windows. . . . *(During this speech, the mannequin U.L. begins to stir. It is Harriet Tubman.)*

Harr: I know that room! I *know* that room! The marshals snatched a fugitive slave away from me outside of Rochester and took him to that room. I hid outside, scraping the soot off those windows, trying to see in.

SBA: Saints be praised! If it isn't Harriet Tubman! I've always wanted to shake your hand! *(They do so)* Susan B. Anthony!

Harr: Yep, I'm Harriet Tubman, alright. Although, lots of folks called me "Moses." Heck, John Brown himself used to call me "General" Tubman.

Mary: *(Whispering)* Mrs. Willard, who's Harriet Tubman?

Emma: *(Much too loudly, embarrassing Mary)* Harriet Tubman, born a slave, exact date unknown. Ran away from her master and spent most of her life rescuing other slaves from captivity.

Mary: Wow!

Harr: Born a slave . . . like my mother and father before me. My grandparents were free, till they were brought here in chains from Africa. I grew up on a big plantation in Maryland . . . Funny. My earliest memory was of the first time I tried to run away. My daddy found me and brought me back. I was nine years old. *(To audience)* How old are you all? *(Most will be 9)* Uh-huh, then I was just your age. The master whipped me so hard, I thought my shoulderblades would crack. But I didn't cry out. I felt all hard inside . . . like I swallowed a stone . . . I wasn't a good servant. Everybody in the big house complained about me. When I was 13 or 14, a field boss struck me in the head with a shovel and fractured my skull

. . . *(laughing)* years later, I would doze off all the time and my husband joked with me that I was sleepy 'cause I got hit upside the head. . . . He was probably right.

Mary: I can't imagine anyone hitting you, you're so tall and. . . .

Harr: Strong? Yes, my muscles grew round and hard from working with my father. He was a wood cutter.

SBA: You referred to yourself as "Moses." How did you come by that name?

Harr: When I was around 30, I heard that the slaves on my plantation were going to be sold to many different owners. I didn't want to lose touch with my family. So, one night, I snuck out of a window and ran all the way to Philadelphia, where I got a job in a hotel. After that, I secretly went back to the plantation and guided my sisters to freedom. Then, the next time, I brought out my brother, his family, and eleven others. All together, I reckon in the ten years before the Civil War I made about 19 trips down to Maryland to guide my people to freedom.

SBA: But what about the name, "Moses?"

Harr: Well, you know the song, don't you? . . . You know, "Go Down Moses?" *(They look blankly; so Harriet begins to sing)*

Go down, Moses,

Way down in Egypt's land.

(The others recognize the song, and join Harriet, who starts over)

ALL: Go down, Moses,

Way down in Egypt's land.

Tell ole Pharaoh

Let my people go.

Emma: Do you not see, Miss Anthony? It's the Bible story. When Moses led the Jewish people out of Egypt, the Pharaoh chased them with chariots and horses. . . .

Mary: *(Interrupting)* And God held back the waters of the Red Sea to let Moses pass. Then God made the water rise again and drown all Pharaoh's army.

SBA: Of course! And Miss Tubman, as the rescuer of her people, became known as "Moses."

Harr: I was known as Moses. And my people said, "Go down, Moses!"

Mary: Go down, Moses!

Harr: They said, "Go down, Moses!"

Mary/

SBA: Go down, Moses!

Harr: They said, "Moses, go down and tell old Pharaoh to let our people go!"

Emma: Yay! *(Everybody looks at Emma)* My! Such excitement! Mrs. Tubman . . .

- Harr:** Call me Harriet.
- Emma:** Harriet, weren't these trips to slave country filled with danger?
- Harr:** Of course they were. But I outfoxed them every time. I used to send my people messages written in code using Bible talk, like: "Tell my brothers to be always watching unto prayer, and when the good old ship of Zion comes along, to be ready to step on board."
- Mary:** Oh! That meant to keep a watch for your wagon that would carry them to safety!
- Harr:** You got it. I brought my parents out that way when they were over 80 years old. Another time, I escaped the sheriff by putting my people on a train headed south. Nobody ever thought that runaway slaves would travel in *that* direction. Then there was a time I let loose a bunch of chickens in the middle of town and, while everybody was tripping over them, me and my people got away.
- SBA:** I notice you carry a rifle. Why is that?
- Harr:** Got my Winchester. I had a revolver too. Had to carry them for my own protection. Plus, a slave who decides at the last minute that he doesn't want to run away is more likely to find his courage when there's a gun pointed at him.
- Emma:** But were you never caught?
- Harr:** Nope. For a while, there was a \$40,000 reward for my capture, but they couldn't stop me. One time, in Troy, New York, I disguised myself and got right next to the U. S. marshals who were taking a fugitive slave named Charles Nalle back to the South. I threw my arms around Charles and a big fight started. We broke loose and ran down a hill, got knocked down, and rolled right into the Hudson River, but I never let go of him. Then, when they thought we were dead, we swam out and I got him into a boat to cross the Hudson.
- Mary:** Did he get away?
- Harr:** No. The marshals caught him and, the next day, we stormed the office where he was being held. A good man, my helper, died in the fight, but Charles Nalle escaped to freedom.
- SBA:** You referred to John Brown. I assume you meant the famous abolitionist?
- Harr:** That's the man. I met John Brown in Canada and helped him make plans for his war against slavery. He said I was such a good planner that he was going to call me "General" Tubman. Told me I could lead his army any time I wanted.
- Emma:** What were you doing in Canada?
- Harr:** After the United States passed the Fugitive Slave Laws, which made it illegal to be a runaway even in the North, Canada became the end of the line for the Underground Railroad.
- Mary:** Underground Railroad? What's that, a subway train?
- SBA:** No, my dear, the Underground Railroad was a network of people against slavery, like Mrs. Tubman. . . .
- Harr:** Harriet.
- SBA:** Like Harriet, who helped runaway slaves leave the South. The people would hide the slaves in houses, barns, and churches, and arrange transportation for them by night.
- Harr:** That's right. And the "Railroad" went from Virginia all the way to Canada. Had lots of activity right around here, too. It was dangerous work for the people who helped out. They could be arrested and fined more money than they could make in ten years. It was dangerous for the slaves, too. If they got caught and sent back to their masters they'd get badly beaten. I heard tell of one woman who got her foot cut off so she could never run away again.
- Emma:** I seem to recall that one of my young ladies told a story about her mother. Her family lived in Sand Lake and they had fugitive slaves in their tavern from time to time. Once, while the marshals were searching the house for runaways, the mother sat on her porch rocker, knitting a shawl. When the marshals left empty-handed, several children crawled out from beneath the mother's large skirt. She had hidden them right under the marshals' noses!
- SBA:** Not just Sand Lake, but Albany, Troy, Brunswick, and Lansingburgh were active in the Underground Railroad.
- Emma:** That's true. I remember the day the train carrying John Brown's body came through Troy. His widow insisted it do so, because of all the abolitionists who lived there and had helped slaves escape. (*During this speech, the D.L. mannequin, Kate Mullaney, rises.*)
- Kate:** Yes, I remember that day well. All the men in the iron-works got to go to the depot to see the dead man's train. But me and my sisters in the laundry weren't permitted to go. We had to work, like always. (*There is a silence*) . . . You don't know who I am, do you? . . . Well . . . I'm just a woman. . . . I'm nothing but a woman.
- Mary:** (*Noticing the bandage on Kate's arm*) What happened to your arm?
- Kate:** Nothing unusual for the likes of me. I leaned too close to my red-hot iron and burned the flesh off my arm.
- Emma:** Dear Lord!
- Kate:** It's not so bad. At least it will heal. My sister was only sixteen when both her hands swelled up into angry red lumps. Her fingernails fell out and she couldn't hold a spoon to drink her soup. She was a starcher and her hands were in wheatstarch all day. It was that gooey, awful stuff that gave her the disease.

- We called the sickness "felon," because it stole the money from our pockets when we couldn't work any more. My union forced the company to change from wheat to cornstarch, which didn't harm the hands.
- SBA:** I once knew a collar laundress from Troy who was a union organizer. Her name was Kate Mullaney.
- Kate:** And so is mine. I recognized you immediately. You're Susan B. Anthony, ain't ya'. I once wrote you a letter that you printed in your newspaper, *The Revolution*.
- SBA:** I remember. You related how your union planned to start your own collar manufacturing company.
- Kate:** It only lasted a short time. We couldn't compete with the Cluett Company. Troy became known as Collar City, but it couldn't have happened if me and my sister-workers didn't toil our lives away.
- Mary:** I don't get it. Why did you only wash collars? Couldn't you have washed the whole shirt? And how come people brought you their laundry? Couldn't they have used their own washing machines?
- Harr:** Ain't it amazing how little young people know about the past! In the first place, in those days collars were separate from shirts. (*Kate takes out collar and shows to audience*) Every free man had lots of collars, and he'd wear a fresh one every day.
- SBA:** And Miss Mullaney didn't wash people's laundry. She washed the new collars that the factory had made. As for washing machines, electric appliances didn't start to appear regularly until all of us were dead and gone.
- Kate:** It was long, hard work. First, we had to wash the collars in a suds bath, then we bleached them in hyperchloride of soda. Many's the time a bleacher fainted from the fumes of that poison. Then came sulphuric acid, to complete the bleaching process. It ate the skin down to the bone. The bleached collars had to go into the suds bath again, to remove the bleach. Then they were boiled, rubbed, rinsed, blued, rolled, thin starched, thick starched, dried, and finally ironed.
- Mary:** And you did all that?
- Kate:** No! That would have been impossible and too slow. Each group of women had a different task. I was a ironer. I had to support myself, my mother, and two younger sisters. I stood on my feet for eleven hours a day . . . sometimes *fourteen* hours a day! The temperature in the shop was over 90 degrees in the dead of winter. I had to continually lift a hot, heavy iron. The women on either side of me both got lung disease and died. None but the strongest could stand it.
- Emma:** Was there no other job you could get?
- Kate:** I was Irish! It was either collar laundering or serving and cleaning up after others. Besides, the money was good. When I started, I made \$4.64 a week. Trouble was, the average working *man* made three times more.
- SBA:** So you decided to join a union.
- Kate:** Not *join* a union, but start my own. I knew that women had to organize separately from men. Women were just as smart as men, but were afraid to speak up at union meetings led by men. So, their needs were usually ignored.
- Harr:** Did the union succeed?
- Kate:** Better than I could've dreamed. We called ourselves the Women's Collar Laundry Union, and we represented over 100 workers. We lasted from 1864 to 1869, longer than almost any other union of that time.
- Harr:** What did you get that you didn't have before?
- Kate:** The main thing was that we raised our weekly wages to \$6.96. Our bosses never would've given us more money if they could have fired us. But, in a union, everyone stands together. There were too many of us to fire all at once.
- Harr:** I remember, back in Philadelphia, they were always trying to *bust-up* unions. The bosses ever try that with you?
- Kate:** One time they tried to train girls to take our place. Ironing took lots of skill and wasn't an easy job to learn.
- Harr:** That's just what they did in Philadelphia. Did it work?
- Kate:** No! It turned into one big pot of stew that the bosses found themselves swimming in! The girls who they were training figured out that they could get jobs and push the union out, but that, without the union, their wages would be terribly low. So, instead of helping the bosses, they joined us!
- Emma:** Why did the union stop in 1869?
- Kate:** We went on strike for higher wages. The bosses didn't care about the few pennies more, but they saw a chance to bust our union. The bosses were powerful men and they controlled the newspapers. Everybody in Troy was told how a "bunch of female busybodies" were destroying the city's main industry. . . . They all turned against us and the union was broken.
- SBA:** You should have turned to my organization, the Workingwomen's Association, for help.
- Kate:** We did! And you know how much your sweet ladies raised for us? Thirty dollars! Thirty dollars for 200 souls! That's all we could expect from *rich people*!
- SBA:** How dare you!
- Kate:** And what's more, your newspaper—with all its claptrap about women's rights—didn't even hire women from the Printer's Union! You were too cheap!
- SBA:** We couldn't do everything! The drive for women's suffrage was terribly expensive. Women were nothing if they couldn't vote. Voting was all that mattered!

Harr: You talk like a crazy woman! What good does voting do if women are beaten like animals and don't have their freedom?

Emma: Fiddlesticks! Freedom is of no use to woman if she does not have the education to take advantage of her freedom!

Mary: Hey, hold on! Don't start fighting! I think each one of you is wonderful! You each dared to do something great and succeeded. Please . . . don't! . . . *(She is crying. The women look at each other. Harriet goes over to comfort the crying Mary).*

Kate: You know, she's absolutely right! I think the Bible says that "from out of the mouths of babes comes wisdom." I'm sorry, Mary. *(She kisses Mary)* It was my Irish temper that got me going. And these other ladies are sorry, too. *(To Emma)* Aren't you?

Emma: I'm sorry, Mary.

Kate: *(To SBA)* Aren't you? *(SBA balks)* Aren't you?

SBA: I'm sorry, Mary.

(Under the following speech, the cast hums the "Battle Hymn of the Republic")

Kate: We're all of us nothing but women. And an American woman's got the right to live the best life she can. But it's a struggle, and fighting among ourselves ain't going to get us anywhere. We are equal in the eyes of God, whether in our right to be educated, to earn a fair wage, to vote for the man *or* woman of our choice, and to have all these rights regardless of our skin.

Harr: I think she's asleep.

Kate: Let her be. It's time for us to go back to sleep ourselves. When she wakes up, she'll forget us, but—God willing—she'll not forget the struggle we all fought. More children are coming tomorrow, and we have to be at our best. Until the next time, sweet sleep, sisters.

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